

Labor and Public Employees Committee Public Hearing

Thursday, February 25, 2010

**Comments submitted by Dan Malloy, former Mayor of Stamford, Conn., in support of:
S.B. No. 63, An Act Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave To Employees:**

Good afternoon.

I'd like to thank the Chairs and Members of the committee for hearing my testimony.

My name is Dan Malloy. I am the former Mayor of Stamford, a position which I was honored to serve in for 14 years. It is in part because of my experiences as mayor that I've come here today. As the mayor of a major Connecticut city with a large and vibrant workforce, I saw firsthand the impact that illness can take on both the individual and on the broader organization in which that person functions. I witnessed the annual outbreak of flu and helped manage efforts to contain it, and I saw the impact on residents in my community when their private employers made it clear that missing work was, for them, simply not an option.

The importance of paid sick leave and other basic worker benefits, however, was actually first impressed upon me at a much younger age. When I was a child my mother, a nurse, organized her fellow nurses to protect themselves against an employer who had begun the practice of dividing full time jobs with benefits into part time jobs without any benefits. These were hard workers – many of them having spent most of their adult lives in the same professional capacity. They were asking for nothing more than a basic level of respect and a protection of their benefits.

Given these experiences, it is my firm and long-held belief that access to paid sick leave should be counted among the basic rights and needs of every working person in Connecticut. Broadly speaking, I believe that for three reasons:

First and foremost: it's good public policy.

Above all else, providing time off for sick employees makes sense for Connecticut from a public policy and public health standpoint.

Hundreds of thousands of Connecticut employees currently don't have paid sick days, an astoundingly high amount for a state of our size. Within that group, we have tens of thousands

of employees who work in industries that have extremely high contact with the public, such as food service and healthcare.

When those people feel compelled to come to work sick – either because they fear losing their job or because they won't be able to make rent without that income – they get people around them sick.

Ironically, many Connecticut workers who have the most direct contact with the public end up being the ones without paid sick days. Food service workers being just one example. Additionally, allowing workers to take time to seek early treatment for illness also means fewer trips to the emergency room for untreated illness – saving the state money.

When it comes to recovery from illness, paid sick days allow the ill to recover more quickly with less chance of setbacks, allowing workers to incur less medical costs over time, and putting less of a burden on our emergency rooms and clinics. Their children benefit as well, as it's been shown that children recover from illnesses more quickly when they have a parent around to help them get well and attend to their needs.

In short, allowing sick workers time to recuperate benefits the entire population.

Second: It's not anti-business.

While many in the business community will tell you that mandating sick days will hurt the business community, this simply isn't true.

For one, when people feel they have no choice but to go to work sick, they directly impact their coworkers' ability to do their jobs efficiently and productively.

Of course, it's true that a paid sick leave policy would have a modest financial impact on an employer's bottom line during the time in which a worker is actually ill. However, studies show that businesses which do not provide sick days have higher employee turnover rates, and that on average businesses that provide sick leave save money from having lower turnover, improved productivity and a reduced spread of illness.

The bottom line is that there are smart, fair ways to improve the business climate in Connecticut that don't involve jeopardizing the public health.

Third, and finally: On the most basic, humane level – it's simply the right thing to do.

It's wrong that we would penalize workers – salaried or on hourly wage – for being ill. A person should not have to worry about missing a rent check or a mortgage payment because they catch the flu.

When taken in perspective, it's frankly surprising that it has taken so long for Connecticut to recognize and address this problem. The mandates laid out in S.B No. 63 are much less restrictive on employers than any minimum wage and overtime pay law we currently have in place. And, since the mandates would positively impact not just the individual worker but also the broader population at large... the conclusion we should reach is obvious: Connecticut should pass legislation to put a fair and equitable mandate in place guaranteeing employee access to paid sick days.

Thank you.